



Maddalena Marinari, Madeline Yuan-yin Hsu, María Cristina García, eds. *A Nation of Immigrants Reconsidered: US Society in an Age of Restriction, 1924-1965*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019. 328 pp. \$30.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-252-08396-9.

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Historians have long envisioned the period between 1924 and 1965 as an interregnum in US immigration policy. The watershed legislation of the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, so the story goes, ushered in an era of immigration restriction based on race and national origins that remained unquestioned by citizens and policymakers for decades. Then, civil rights activists, the children of southern and eastern European immigrants, and even the first generation of immigration historians finally shook the federal government from its paralysis in the 1960s. Their efforts effected liberal reforms through the Hart-Celler Act of 1965, thereby ending the racist system of immigration restriction and exclusion implemented a generation prior. While this long-standing narrative still holds certain merits, according to the arguments in *A Nation of Immigrants Reconsidered: US Society in an Age of Restriction 1924–1965*, it offers an incomplete picture at best. As the editors Maddalena Marinari, Madeline, Y. Hsu, and Maria Cristina Garcia make clear, we should jettison the notion that 1924–65 represents “an unremarkable interlude between two great eras of mass migration to the United States” (p. 2). Although immigration decreased overall after 1924, they argue that historians must recognize that the period constituted a formative time when immigration and

policy did not stagnate, but “changed form, composition, aspiration, and legal expression” (p. 2).

To make these claims, *A Nation of Immigrants Reconsidered* brings together the work of leading immigration and labor historians, policy experts, sociologists, and ethnic studies specialists through twelve chapters divided across three thematic sections. The first section focuses on policy and law, the second zeroes in on the connection between immigration and labor, and last section probes the issues of citizenship and belonging. Each section comes with its own introduction that helps explicate the connections between the section’s chapters, while the introduction to the volume as a whole lays bare the need for further study of this under-researched period. Especially valuable for nonspecialists, the main introduction also includes a concise summary of US immigration policy from the 1790s to the present day. This short but effective segment serves as necessary context for the chapters that follow but could also work well on its own as a primer on immigration policy in the classroom.

In addition to the thematic cohesion of the book’s three sections, several other patterns emerge that bridge the arguments from one chapter to the next. The effect of international relations on US immigration policy, the influence of

Cold War politics, and the importance of assessing policy in conjunction with the experience and agency of immigrants rank among the most significant ideas discussed throughout the entire work. These threads collectively reinforce the central claims of the contributors and at the same time help tie the book together.

Indeed, one of the great strengths of *A Nation of Immigrants Reconsidered* is that despite its apparent focus on US immigration and policy, many of the chapters consider developments outside the borders of the United States. This book demonstrates how immigration, by definition, is a process involving multiple nations and more frequently than not, requires cooperation and coordination among different nation-states and their international bureaucratic apparatuses. This dynamic, in turn, necessitates a transnational and global scope for most studies of migration.

The argument for this transnational perspective emerges early in the volume with Eliot Young's opening chapter, "Beyond Borders: Remote Control and the Continuing Legacy of Racism in Immigration Legislation." Young builds on the essential work of political scientist Aristide Zolberg, historian Adam McKeown, and many others to demonstrate how nation-states are not "a coherent territory demarcated by clear borderlines," but operate instead like "a web of global economic and political relationships." "The more powerful the nation," he argues, "the more potent are its global tentacles" (p. 27). We see examples of this throughout the book, such as in Kathleen Lopez's chapter on the relationship between the United States, its Caribbean neighbors, and excluded European and Chinese immigrants who sought to enter the United States through Caribbean countries to circumvent restriction.

A multi-state analysis and narrative emerges in other sections of the book as well, including the powerfully argued chapters by Heather Lee and Eiichiro Azuma. Lee's "Hunting for Sailors: Restaurant Raids and Conscription of Laborers during

World War II" explores a surprising arrangement where the US War Shipping Administration and Immigration and Naturalization Service worked for the British to track down and detain alien mariners who absconded from exploitative working conditions aboard British shipping vessels. Azuma's chapter focuses on an understudied post-war Japanese guest worker program implemented after WWII. This program, organized by Japanese American farming interests in conjunction with the Japanese government, provides another clear example of how immigration policies continued to develop in concert with the cooperation of other states and their officials.

The power of international relations in the shaping of immigration policy during the post-WWII and Cold War eras drives the arguments in many of the chapters. Arissa H. Oh's "Japanese War Brides and the Normalization of Family Unification after World War II," for example, persuasively makes just the argument that the title suggests. David FitzGerald and David Cook-Martín also advance the Cold War theme in "The Geopolitical Origins of the 1965 Immigration Act." They show through a comparative global analysis how the passage of the 1965 Act had more to do with geopolitical realities than the domestic civil rights movement precipitating a reckoning with racist immigration policy.

While much of this volume looks at immigration policy from the top down, several scholars' contributions approach their subjects as social historians might, offering an analysis of immigrant action, resistance to racism and restriction, and lived experience. Lorrin Thomas's "Foreign, Dark, Young, Citizen: Puerto Rican Youth and the Forging of an American Identity, 1930-70" supplies a remarkably upbeat analysis of social and political organizing among New York City's Puerto Rican migrants, who, despite facing racist attitudes, discrimination, and segregation over multiple generations, relentlessly advocated for equal treatment

and laid claim to their rights as US citizens throughout much of the twentieth century.

Social networks and resistance also figured into the actions of the sailors Lee examined as they evaded the forces of British and US immigration enforcement by utilizing connections with kinfolk and Chinese restaurant owners on the eastern seaboard. Ultimately, Lee shows how their resistance reveals an “expansive migrant network that existed to counter the unchecked tyranny of imperial power upon its subjects” (p. 120). In the final chapter, Ana Elizabeth Rosas explores the emotional and familial toll wrought by the Bracero Program on Mexican migrant workers and their loved ones, affording historians and the students of history alike a most humanizing reminder that immigration policy has a real impact on the way migrants live, love, and experience loss.

Rounding out the volume is an afterword by Violet Showers Johnson that serves as a poignant rebuke of immigration historians for their long-standing habit of disregarding Black migrations to the United States as a legitimate area of study. “Devaluation of the Black immigrant presence before 1965 is a casualty of the premium placed on numbers,” Johnson contends (p. 274). As *A Nation of Immigrants Reconsidered* demonstrates, there is real value in studying periods in which the volume of migrants crossing borders is not at its peak. Even small numbers of actors can have a big impact in surprising ways. To its credit, this volume does include the illuminating work of Ronald L. Mize on Caribbean migrations and the rise of temporary worker visas. Yet Johnson’s critiques are not unwarranted, demonstrating that the field still has plenty of lacunae demanding scholarly attention.

Bold as this volume is, the editors might have taken one step further and abandoned the periodization of 1924–65 altogether. To suggest, as the title does, that 1924 is the beginning of the “age of restriction” subtly reinforces notions of American

exceptionalism. It also furthers the idea that the Johnson-Reed Act operated as a singular force in ending an era of global migrations that had been underway for over half a century prior. Many works—including chapters in this volume—have shown that restriction in fact begins much sooner than 1924, and while the nature of restriction changed in 1965, Hart-Celler hardly signaled the end to immigration restriction in the United States or elsewhere. While there is a certain logic to signaling to the field that this work addresses a period long overlooked, much of the work in this volume proves that 1924 and 1965 are not necessarily the most useful points to start or stop a study of US immigration despite the habits of immigration historians in doing so. All the more reason, then, to eschew the 1924–65 periodization. But this is a minor complaint for an otherwise stimulating volume that pushes the boundaries of the study of US immigration in the twentieth century. Moreover, those well aquainted with the relevant historiography of US immigration are sure to be provoked by a work that addresses a period long overdue for serious scholarly attention. Not only is *A Nation of Immigrants Reconsidered* therefore a fine contribution to the field on its own, but it also points to many promising avenues for future studies of migration, race, policy, and twentieth-century United States history.

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